



General Management Plan News

Newsletter One - July 2004

Parks Begin Preparation of General Management Plans

News from the Superintendent

The National Park Service is pleased to announce that the development of new General Management Plans to guide the future of Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument is underway. The General Management Plans and accompanying Environmental Impact Statements will serve as the blueprint for each park's protection and management over the next 15-20 years. You are invited to participate in the development of the plans in the months to come. This newsletter provides general background and contact information on this important effort and how you can participate. We look forward to hearing from you as we begin to chart a course for the future of Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument.

*Art Frederick
Superintendent*

Understanding the General Management Plan

The general management plan (GMP) will describe the general path the National Park Service intends to follow in managing the Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument over the next 15- 20 years. Desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that would be appropriate for each part of the



Trunk Bay

park, and the strategies for achieving those conditions, will be identified. General locations where certain types of development would be appropriate will also be identified. Specific questions regarding how these desired conditions should be achieved will be answered in new or revised implementation plans, such as resource management plans and interpretive plans that tier off the GMP.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and National Park Service policy, the GMP will be combined with an environmental impact statement (EIS). The GMP/EIS will identify significant issues and concerns, present a reasonable range of

management alternatives, and analyze the environmental impacts of each of the alternatives.

The GMP/EIS process involves many steps, including:

▪ Initiate Project

The planning team assembles, customizes the planning processs, and begins to establish contacts with participants.

▪ Define Planning Context and Foundation

The planning team examines why the park's were established and affirms their mission, purpose, and significance. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and gather public comments.

▪ Develop, Present and Evaluate Alternatives

Using an array of staff and public input, the team explores what the park's future should look like and proposes a range of alternatives.

▪ Prepare a Draft Document

The team publishes the Draft GMP/EIS. The draft document describes the alternatives and the impacts of implementing each. Based on an impact analysis of each alternative and public input, the team selects a preferred alternative and presents it in the document.

▪ Publish Final Document

Based on review by the National Park Service and the public, the planning team revises the GMP/EIS and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved by the National Park Service Southeast Region Director in a published record of decision.

▪ Implement the Approved Plan

After the Record of Decision is issued, the GMP/EIS is implemented, as funding allows.

Public meetings were held in July and August to solicit views, opinions and ideas on what the parks should look like in the future. While there will be more opportunities to provide input to the GMPs, input at this initial stage is key to developing the alternatives. The National Park Service asks for your help to identify issues that are most important to you for consideration in the plan.

Background of Virgin Islands National Park

Virgin Islands National Park comprises slightly more than half of the island of St. John and almost



Hawksbill Turtle

nine square miles of the waters surrounding St. John. Hassel Island, a 135 acre island in Charlotte Amalie Harbor, is also a part of the park.

The mission of Virgin Islands National Park, an International Biosphere Reserve, is to protect, preserve, manage, and interpret the park's unique natural and scenic resources and nationally significant cultural resources and values unimpaired for the education, enjoyment and inspiration of present and future generations.

The purpose of the Virgin Islands National Park is:

- To protect and preserve the outstanding marine and terrestrial ecosystems representative of the Eastern Caribbean Biogeographic Province for the benefit and enjoyment of the public and future generations;
- To facilitate orderly, regulated and continuing research by qualified scientists and members

of the academic community to support park management and promote scientific knowledge;

- To promote understanding and stewardship of resources and park values by providing educational and partnering opportunities for local, national, and international communities; and
- To protect and preserve the chronology of history and cultural heritage from pre-Columbian times to the present day- most notably the Taino/preColumbian era, European colonial/plantation era, and African- Caribbean culture and history – for the benefit and enjoyment of the public and future generations.

Within the borders of Virgin Islands National Park lie protected bays, coral reef life, white sandy beaches shaded by seagrape trees, coconut palms, and tropical forests providing habitat for over 800 species of plants. Some of the most pristine remaining dry tropical forests in the Caribbean are

located within the park, and these forests are only one of two sites under federal jurisdiction which provide wintering habitat for neotropical migratory birds. In addition to its natural resources, the park contains a host of cultural resources including relics from the Pre- Columbian Amerindian Civilization, remains of the Danish colonial sugar plantations, and reminders of African slavery and the subsistence culture that followed during the 100 years after emancipation. The park is recognized as the first of seven Caribbean International Man and the Biosphere Reserves in within Lesser Antillean biogeographic province. The park is one of the few biosphere reserves in the world to have both significant marine and terrestrial resources. The park provides a global opportunity for scientists, students, and the public to learn more about tropical marine and terrestrial ecosystems and Caribbean history.

Background of Coral Reef National Monument

Seeking to provide greater protection to the sensitive coral reef resources, President Clinton established Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument on January 17, 2001 by presidential proclamation. The monument

includes 12,708 acres of federal submerged lands within the 3- mile belt off of St. John, including Hurricane Hole and areas north and south of St. John. The mission of Coral Reef National Monument is to protect, preserve, manage and interpret the monument's scenic value, unique natural resources and submerged cultural resources unimpaired for the education, enjoyment, and inspiration of present and future generations.

The purpose of the Coral Reef National Monument is:

- To preserve and protect all the elements of a Caribbean tropical marine ecosystem, and further the protection of the habitats essential for sustaining and enhancing the coastal and submerged ecosystems in Virgin Islands National Park;
- To facilitate orderly, regulated and continuing research by qualified scientists and members of the academic community to support monument management and promote scientific knowledge; and
- To promote understanding and stewardship of resources and monument values by providing educational and partnering opportunities for local, national, and international communities.

The clear waters in the Coral Reef National Monument support a diverse and complex system of coral reefs. The health of these

reefs is closely tied to plants and animals inhabiting the reef as well as adjacent non- coral marine environments such as sandy bottoms, seagrass beds, and mangrove forests. The submerged monument lands contain representative examples of the entire range of tropical marine ecosystems including shallow water mangrove nursery habitats, deep water spawning habitats that are essential to the overall function and productivity of regional fisheries, and habitat for great whales which forage, breed, nest, rest, or calve in the waters. The submerged monument lands within Hurricane Hole support the most extensive and well-developed mangrove habitat on St. John. The monument provides spawning stocks and critical developmental habitats that allow for the restoration of depleted fishery resources and enhancement of adjacent fishing grounds. The monument offers outstanding opportunities for education and scientific research due to the diversity, complexity and relationship of the natural resources and provides a dynamic laboratory for study and learning.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National
Monument
1300 Cruz Bay Creek
St. John, VI 00830

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service appreciates your early input into this planning process and would like your feedback. We request that you provide your comments at the public meetings, or you may provide comments by phone or mail by August 16, 2004 using the following contact information:

**Comments? Write to:
National Park Service**

Virgin Islands National Park
and Coral Reef National
Monument
1300 Cruz Bay Creek
St. John, VI 00830
Art Frederick, Superintendent
VIIS_GMP@nps.gov
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What to Expect

The planning process includes:

1. Public Meetings to Gather Input
2. Develop Alternatives
3. Assess Impacts
4. Draft Document
5. Public Meetings to Gather Comments
6. Finalize Document

Next Steps

After we receive your comments, the planning team will begin to identify alternative future visions for Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument. These broad descriptions of desired conditions and visitor experiences will form the basis for the development of alternative management strategies that address issues generated from the team and the public. The team will also develop management prescriptions that can be applied in various zones around the park to achieve the desired future conditions for those places.